



## 2015 State of the State address

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January 21, 2015

Below is the text of the 2015 State of the State address, given tonight by Gov. Jay Nixon to a joint session of the Missouri General Assembly in Jefferson City:

Thank you, Lt. Gov. Kinder, Speaker Diehl, members of the General Assembly, judges of the Missouri Supreme Court, state officials, members of my cabinet, and honored guests.

I thank God and the people of Missouri for the privilege to serve our state. It would not have been possible without the steadfast support of my family. Here with us tonight is Missouri's First Lady – my wonderful wife, Georganne.

Throughout my life, I have been guided by principles I was taught as a youngster in De Soto Boy Scout Troop 559:

Do your duty ... to God and your country ... help other people at all times ... and leave things better than you found them.

Following these principles, I became an Eagle Scout, a husband, a father, a state senator, Attorney General ... and Governor.

These same principles remain touchstones for service to our great state.

In nearly 30 years of public service, I've learned a lot about the character of the people of Missouri.

We don't expect something for nothing.

But give us an opportunity? We roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Give us a challenge? We rise to meet it.

I have also learned a lot about state government.

If we are mired in partisanship ... not much gets done.

But when we aim high and work together ... there is much we can accomplish.

Let's show the people we serve that we can rise above partisanship ... unite ... and move Missouri forward.

Let's do our duty to God and country... help others ... and leave Missouri better than we found it.

That means working together.

Now, I'm willing to do my part.

Rumor has it that I don't spend enough time on the third floor.

I hear you ... and I'll be coming around more often.

One hour ago ... in my office ... I presented the Legion of Honor to Norbert Gerling of Henley, Missouri. It is the highest distinction bestowed by the French government for service to the people of France.

In the summer of 1944, Mr. Gerling was a Hellcat gunner with the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion. He joined General Patton's Third Army for the drive through France into Germany during the Battle of the Bulge, and was awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious service.

Sergeant Gerling represents millions of members of the Greatest Generation, men and women who demonstrated the grit ... courage ... and unshakable optimism that made our country what it is today.

Sergeant Gerling – would you please stand?

On behalf of all Missourians, we thank you – and all the men and women in uniform who serve our state and our nation at home and around the globe.

For their courage and sacrifice, our veterans deserve more than gratitude. They deserve to live with dignity and pride.

Today, with a generation of Vietnam-era veterans getting older, we need to ensure that all our veterans receive the best care possible.

That's why my budget includes the resources to modernize and improve our state veterans' homes, so that they're up to the high standards our veterans deserve. But we need to do more.

Nearly 2,000 Missouri vets are now on a waiting list to get the care they've earned. That's unacceptable.

And that's why I am proposing the construction of a new veterans' home for these proud Missourians.

These men and women did their duty to God and country, so that our lives might be better.

Now we need to be there for them. Let's work together and get it built.

The spirit of optimism ... that willingness to face any challenge ... has always made us special as Americans and Missourians.

In times of struggle and unrest – like those we saw this past year – that spirit has helped us find a new path forward.

And it's the same spirit that has produced some of Missouri's proudest moments over the past six years.

Together, we led the rebirth of the American auto industry here in the Heartland.

Together, we helped communities recover and rebuild – stronger than ever – in the aftermath of floods, blizzards, and the deadliest tornado in our history in Joplin.

And together, we're moving Missouri forward on a foundation of fiscal discipline and solid economic growth.

Here in Missouri, fiscal discipline is a value.

We balance budgets. We keep taxes low.

And we continue to downsize state government ... while improving services through innovation.

We trimmed the state workforce by more than 5,000 positions ... paid down debt ... and sold off property.

At a time when pension costs were dragging down other states – we worked together to shore up our pension system, saving taxpayers more than \$600 million over ten years.

Strict fiscal discipline helped protect our AAA credit rating, giving us the opportunity to make essential, long-overdue investments in the future.

Last year, the legislature took the first step by passing additional bonding capacity.

That means this year, we can move forward with a strategic bond issuance to fund improvements to our college campuses, state buildings, state parks and veterans' homes.

That means more jobs.

That means better labs for more students.

That means taking care of more veterans.

Let's get it done.

In the past six years, we made government smarter by embracing technology.

From hunting permits to childcare provider information, Missourians can now access hundreds of government services from their smart phones ... saving time, money and aggravation.

I thank the General Assembly for supporting investments in 21st Century technology to better serve our taxpayers.

Technology has dramatically improved the quality of our daily lives. But at the same time, it has created serious security challenges – and growing anxiety – about the safety of sensitive information.

From credit card fraud to identity theft to cyber-terrorism, there are real and mounting threats to our personal information, financial and medical records and even our power grid. Hackers are constantly trying to crack security firewalls ... targeting government and private companies alike.

This year, we will ramp up our cyber-security efforts by partnering with businesses, law enforcement, and universities to identify best practices and educate the public.

Making Missouri a leader in cyber-security will make our families and our personal information safer, create more jobs in our tech sector, and strengthen our growing economy.

And our economy is growing.

Let's take just a second to remember where we started.

When I took office in January 2009, the state had lost more than 65,000 jobs in the previous year.

The unemployment rate was 8.6 percent and rising.

Today, we got the news that our unemployment rate just dropped again – to 5.4 percent.

Home construction is up ... personal income is up ... and Missouri employers created more jobs in 2014 than in any year since 1997.

That's right – we just closed out the best year for job growth in 17 years.

And we're just getting started.

The largest economic development project in our history is underway in Kansas City: Cerner's \$4.4 billion campus for 16,000 workers in high-tech health care.

Thanks to the work we did in a special session one year ago, Boeing is bringing commercial aircraft manufacturing to Missouri for the first time in its history, putting hundreds more to work in North St. Louis County.

And more enterprising Missourians – in small towns and big cities across our state – are starting their own businesses than at any time in the last 20 years.

Another way we're creating more jobs at home?

By selling more Missouri products to Brazil ... China ... Taiwan ... England ... France ... Korea ... Canada and others.

Some of you in this room have joined me on these successful trade missions. We have signed agreements to sell billions of dollars of Missouri goods to businesses and consumers alike.

Last year, our exports hit \$14 billion. That's \$14 billion of Made-in-Missouri products going all over the world.

A big part of that success is from our number one industry: agriculture.

2014 was a phenomenal year for ag exports ... from corn and soybeans ... to rice, chickens, hogs and turkeys.

And there are 11 million more potential customers for Missouri's farm products just 90 miles away from the U.S. ... in Cuba.

For many in my generation, trade with Cuba was unthinkable. But never underestimate the power of American democracy to improve people's lives and open hearts and minds. Once free markets begin to flourish, freedom will follow.

Two weeks ago, I went to Washington and stood with a coalition that now includes more than 40 ag groups calling for expanded trade to Cuba.

In March, I am heading to Havana with our Director of Agriculture, Richard Fordyce, and leaders of national and state commodity groups, to make sure Missouri is first in the door.

Because all we need is an open door, and Missouri's innovative, hard-working producers will do the rest.

We're also working to bring economic opportunity to our small towns and rural communities by boosting our cattle industry.

Missouri ranks second in the nation in cow/calf production, thanks to cutting edge genetic research and the know-how of our farmers and ranchers. But here's the beef.

Nearly all those animals leave Missouri before they're full-grown, and are finished and processed in other states. That means Missouri is missing out on more than \$1 billion in value every year.

We need to keep those cattle – and those dollars – right here in the Show-Me State.

Earlier this month, we brought together hundreds of folks from around the state – producers, scientists, packers, corn-growers, legislators and others – to develop a plan to do just that.

We're also proposing \$1.2 million to research new ways to make our cattle industry more profitable.

With the right strategy on beef, we can strengthen our rural economy, and the families and communities that depend upon it.

Getting more Missouri goods to global markets requires the transportation infrastructure to get them there safely.

We've traditionally paid for roads and bridges through user fees, like the gas tax. Missourians believe it's only fair that folks who use the roads also pay for them.

But with more fuel-efficient vehicles, drivers are getting more miles out of each gallon of gas... so they end up paying less to fund our roads.

As a result, money for our roads and bridges is drying up.

Missouri has the seventh-largest highway system in the nation. But we rank 46th in how much we invest to maintain it.

Last week, we heard MoDOT lay out – in stark terms – what this means.

On thousands of miles of state roads, from Lindbergh in St. Louis to Rangeline in Joplin, we'll barely be able to patch potholes.

By 2017, we won't even have enough revenue to match federal highway dollars.

So what do we do?

One option is a toll road on Interstate 70. The Highway Commission's recent report showed that this approach could make I-70 better and safer ... and free up tens of millions of dollars for other roads around the state.

Trucks and out-of-state vehicles that do the most damage to I-70 would have to pay their fair share.

That deserves serious consideration.

Here's another option: the gas tax.

Missouri's gas tax hasn't gone up a penny in nearly 20 years. It's the fifth-lowest in the nation. With gas prices as low as they are now, this is worth a very close look.

If we want to leave Missouri roads better than we found them, the only thing we can't do is sit still. This is a major, long-term challenge – so let's get moving now.

Creating opportunity for all Missourians requires us to face some painful truths and tackle some difficult challenges.

The events in Ferguson following the death of Michael Brown sparked a national conversation about race and equality, education and economic opportunity, law enforcement and the courts.

We've already taken some meaningful steps forward in Ferguson.

We've provided loans to help small businesses recover.

We'll invest \$2.5 million to improve West Florissant Avenue.

I created the Office of Community Engagement, led by former Senator Maida Coleman. She is already doing great work, including overseeing a summer jobs program for thousands of low-income kids in St. Louis and Kansas City.

Last fall, I created the Ferguson Commission, which continues its vital work of listening, learning, and evaluating solutions. I look forward to receiving its final report this September.

But make no mistake.

The legacy of Ferguson will be determined by what we do next ... to foster healing and hope ... and the changes we make to strengthen all of our communities.

Many of the broader, systemic issues will require sustained effort by those of us in this room.

We need to reform municipal courts so that all citizens are treated fairly;

We need to update the state statute governing deadly force to be consistent with constitutional requirements and U. S. Supreme Court precedent;

We need to support policies that foster racial understanding... and compassion;

We need to create greater economic opportunity and encourage personal responsibility;

We need to strengthen failing schools and provide access to affordable health care;

And we must recruit, train and certify professional law enforcement that reflects the diversity of the community it serves.

The men and women of law enforcement serve and protect in difficult and dangerous circumstances.

They put their lives on the line to protect our lives.

We are proud of our law enforcement officers, for all they do, each and every day.

We send them into streets where there is too much violence ... and too little hope.

Too much fear ... and too little trust.

But some folks feel they have to choose sides:

Them ... or us.

Teens or cops.

Black or white.

The truth is ... we're all in this together.

The truth is ... real and lasting change is only possible when we stand together.

We saw many examples of compassion and generosity in Ferguson. Religious leaders, residents and business owners pitched in to help.

Teachers volunteered to provide activities for hundreds of kids at the public library, after school was cancelled.

One day last summer, troopers from the Missouri State Highway Patrol were driving through Canfield Green, when they noticed a basketball hoop that looked pretty sad ... didn't even have a net.

So with their own money, the troopers went to a local store and bought a net and a new basketball. Then the troopers drove back, hung the net and tossed the ball to some neighborhood kids.

Back on the same street the next day, the troopers saw that a pickup game was underway. And they joined in.

Of course, it was more than just a friendly game of hoops.

It was an opportunity to ease tensions ... to foster trust ... and to bring about the kind of change that is needed in communities all across America.

As we search for long-term strategies to promote equality and economic opportunity, we don't need to look further than education.

Education is the great equalizer.

Because when every child has a quality education, every child has the opportunity to succeed.

And education is the best economic development tool we have.

That's why we've increased funding, while also raising our expectations with more rigorous classes ... tougher tests, and stricter accountability.

And Missouri schools are rising to the challenge.

Over the past six years, math scores have gone up ... reading scores have gone up ... and we're starting to see solid progress in some of our most troubled school districts.

Tonight we are joined by Dr. Tiffany Anderson, the Superintendent of the Jennings School District in North St. Louis County, and Breyannah Parker, a 7th Grade student at College Prep Academy with a 4.0 GPA.

More than 90 percent of the kids in her district come from poor families – but they aren't letting anything hold them back.

Jennings students have made big leaps forward over the past several years with higher test scores and higher graduation rates.

Please join me in thanking Dr. Anderson for her leadership and dedication to the success of students like Breyannah.

Visit communities across our state – and you'll get a sense for how strongly Missourians support their local public schools ... and their teachers.

Last fall at the polls, voters overwhelmingly rejected a wrong-headed attack on public school teachers with more than 76 percent of Missourians voting against it.

That initiative, bankrolled by a narrow special interest, lost in every single county of the state.

In Stone County and Sullivan County ... Wayne and Washington ... Greene and Iron County, Missourians demonstrated just how fiercely they stand behind public schools.

Because Missourians know we need to pay our teachers more.

Not chip away at their job security.

Where our public schools thrive, our communities thrive.

And if we're completely honest about where our schools stand ... we've still got work to do.

Because better isn't good enough. Our kids deserve the best.

My budget will invest an additional \$11 million in pre-school, so that more children, regardless of their circumstances, start kindergarten ... ready to learn.

And once again, I am proposing record funding for K-12 education ... with an additional \$150 million for our local public schools.

That means more technology in classrooms ... smaller class sizes ... more hands-on learning ...

It also means better pay for the folks that do the toughest, most important job there is: teaching our kids.

I appreciate the good, bipartisan discussions we've had about the school transfer law. And I am confident the legislature will get a clean fix to my desk this session.

We know that the fastest-growing, highest-paying jobs in the global economy are in science, technology, engineering and math.

But right now less than 20 percent of undergrads at our public universities are getting degrees in these demanding



academic disciplines.

We've got to expose kids – at an early age – to programs that bring science and math to life ... like Project Lead the Way.

I've been to Project Lead the Way classrooms where kids were analyzing DNA and designing software. It's a real game-changer.

We now have more Project Lead the Way computer science programs than any other state.

But not enough schools are using Project Lead the Way at the elementary level. We need to ramp that up dramatically.

That's why my budget provides start-up grants to expand Project Lead the Way to another 350 elementary schools.

When it comes to higher education, we continue to be guided by our core principles: quality, affordability – and accountability.

Since 2009, Missouri has led the nation in holding down tuition increases at our public universities.

I'm proposing an additional \$25 million for colleges and universities, based on how well they meet strong performance standards.

We're also working to provide state-of-the-art facilities that will prepare our students for high-tech jobs ... replacing lab equipment that's more than 30 years old ... upgrading engineering buildings with leaky roofs and poor lighting.

Because we can't prepare students for 21st Century jobs with equipment that was obsolete in the 20th Century.

In fact, with your hard work last year, one of these projects is already underway.

Long-overdue renovations at Mizzou's College of Engineering will add classroom and lab space to prepare more Missourians for the high-tech, high-wage jobs of the future.

Educating a competitive workforce is something we all can get behind.

Thank you for your support in getting this done.

Education is key to the economic future of our state.

And so are our natural resources.

Missouri is blessed with an abundance of fresh water – from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, to our clear-running Ozark streams.

We take it for granted.

But if you go upstream to the Dakotas, to the headwaters of the Missouri, it's a different story.

They're fighting over water.

They want to divert as much water from the Missouri River as they can, which would leave our farmers and shippers high and dry.

Take Kansas.

Their latest harebrained idea is the construction of a 360-mile aqueduct to siphon off more of our Missouri River water.

We can't let that happen.

As long as I am Governor, I will not let states upstream divert Missouri River water that we rely on for drinking, farming and industry.

We need to protect the amount of water we have in Missouri, and we need to protect the quality of water we have in Missouri.

All over the state, drinking and wastewater treatment systems – many built decades ago – are starting to fall apart.

If you've ever had a pipe burst in your basement – or a cracked main in your subdivision – you know how costly it can be.

That's why my budget this year includes \$70 million – funds already approved by the voters and the legislature – to rebuild these aging water systems, and ensure that we leave Missouri's waters better than we found them.

Our rivers and streams are part of the priceless outdoor heritage all Missourians can enjoy.

And our 87 state parks and historic sites have been recognized as the finest in the nation for camping, hiking, bicycling and paddling – with millions of visitors every year.

This year is our opportunity to update and renovate our state park cabins and lodges, with special attention to preserving the historic structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

One of the most iconic CCC structures in our state parks is the bridge at Bennett Spring.

It's just one of many special places that we need to preserve for generations to come.

I've spoken a lot tonight about some of the big challenges we must overcome to create opportunity and build a brighter future for our state.

Now I'd like to talk about another challenge ... but an even greater opportunity:

Strengthening and reforming Medicaid.

Let me remind you, a lot has changed since last year.

Since I stood here last year, Missouri taxpayers have sent \$2 billion to Washington.

Those dollars are being used right now, in other states, to reform and improve their Medicaid systems.

That's two billion Missouri taxpayer dollars. And this year, there's another \$2 billion at stake.

If we keep standing still, that's \$4 billion Missourians will have lost to other states by the end of this year.

Across the country, people are moving past the politics.

Republican governors in Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, North Dakota and Ohio have already strengthened Medicaid in their states.

Since last year, even more Republican governors have come forward with Medicaid proposals ... in Utah and Tennessee, Indiana and Wyoming.

Even the Republican Governor of Alabama has indicated he may join them.

Many states are pursuing innovative reforms – demanding personal responsibility, encouraging work and cracking down on fraud. And they're using our tax dollars to do it.

And where our tax dollars have gone, health care jobs have followed.

States that have strengthened and improved Medicaid have had three times the growth in health care jobs as states that haven't.

Hospitals are often the largest local employers in our communities. But jobs in health care – which comprise one-sixth of the jobs in our total economy – aren't growing like they should.

In fact, in the past year, thousands of Missouri health care jobs have been lost.

Hospitals and clinics have closed. And if we don't take action, more will follow.

Last summer, an official WARN notice was sent to our Department of Economic Development from the CEO at Ozarks Community Hospital in Springfield about impending layoffs.

The CEO explained that his hospital was going to cut 60 jobs in Missouri, but hire 62 new workers across the border in Arkansas.

The CEO wrote – and I quote:

“The reason we are hiring in Arkansas and laying off in Missouri is that Arkansas chose to expand Medicaid ... and Missouri did not ... I fear that Missouri will never recover the ground it is now losing statewide as a result of political posturing.”

End quote.

Folks, this is real. The time to move forward is now.

It's also really important to remember that standing still on Medicaid has a human cost.

The 300,000 Missourians who would get health care if we moved forward are your friends and neighbors.

13,000 of them are veterans ... 50,000 are people struggling with mental illness or substance abuse ...

And tens of thousands more are working Missourians who live below the poverty line. Because they are working, they earn too much to get Medicaid. But they can't afford to buy health insurance on their own.

Let's work together ... rise above the same old partisan fights of years ago and strengthen and reform Medicaid this year.

You know that when we work together, we can make a real difference. Just look at what we've done to strengthen our mental health system.

We passed landmark legislation to help children with autism.

We're building a state-of-the art mental hospital in Fulton, replacing one that opened in 1851.

We put mental health professionals in community health centers to work hand-in-hand with local law enforcement. Together, they're helping thousands of vulnerable Missourians with chronic mental illness get the treatment they need.

And for the first time in 20 years, there is no longer an agonizing wait – of weeks, months, or even years – for in-home services for low-income Missourians with developmental disabilities.

That's what happens when we work together.

Those of us in state government understand its role in protecting the vulnerable ... preserving the peace ... fostering greater economic opportunity ... and educating our children.

And yet, many Missourians have grown cynical about state government's ability to help them better their own lives.

That's because they believe the system is rigged against them ... favoring the wealthy and well-connected ... while ignoring hard-working folks driving trucks, waiting tables, stocking shelves ... just trying to make ends meet.

Like I said before, Missourians don't expect something for nothing.

But they do expect a fair shake ... and they deserve it.

What good are we to the people who elected us ... if they can't trust us to represent their best interests?

That is exactly why we need ethics reform.

I've talked about it ... right here ... every year that I have been Governor.

We have the weakest ethics laws in the nation.

It's not fair ... it's not right ... and you and I know it.

Every day we don't act, the public's confidence in us continues to erode.

No more excuses. Let's get a meaningful ethics reform bill to my desk.

When we work together, we can achieve great things for the people of our state.

Last week I was at the Detroit Auto Show, where Missouri's award-winning trucks and vans once again took center stage.

Today, our automotive comeback may seem like it was always inevitable. But back in 2009, it was anything but.

The national recession and competition from overseas had dealt a crippling blow to our auto industry. By the time I took office, plants were closed – or closing – in Hazelwood ... south St. Louis ... north St. Louis ... and Fenton.

There were rumors that Ford's Kansas City Assembly Plant – and 4,000 hard-working folks employed there – might be next.

I was not about to let that happen.

As long as cars were going to be made somewhere, I was determined to make sure it was Missourians who were building them.

The first executive order I signed was to create an automotive jobs task force. We also ramped up our investments in workforce training.

But to secure the future of next-generation automotive manufacturing in our state – we had to do more.

That's why, when we couldn't get it done in regular session in 2010, I called a special session to pass strategic, fiscally responsible legislation that would ultimately pull our auto industry back from the brink.

And when it passed, I signed it right there in Claycomo with the hardworking men and women of Local 249.

So, it's no accident that soon, more vehicles will be rolling off the line at Claycomo than any other Ford plant in the world.

It's no accident that General Motors' plant in Wentzville continues to expand to build the award-winning Chevy Colorado and the GMC Canyon.

And it's no accident that Motor Trend's top three trucks of 2015 are all built right here in the Show-Me State.

Ford, GM and more than 60 automotive suppliers have invested more than \$2 billion in Missouri since 2010.

You think bringing auto manufacturing back in the Heartland was an easy lift? It wasn't.

It required passage of two pieces of legislation during that special session. And one of them passed by just two votes.

Many said it wouldn't get done. They were wrong.

There are 24 members who voted for both bills who are still serving in the legislature today, including then-Speaker Ron Richard.

Four of them are now your leaders – President Pro Tem Tom Dempsey, Senate Minority Leader Joe Keaveny, House Minority Leader Jake Hummel and Speaker of the House John Diehl.

These weren't easy votes for everyone at the time.

But it was the right thing to do.

So if you want to get ahead around here?

Do the right thing.

Reach across the aisle.

Together we can do great things for our state.

But the real credit for rebuilding our auto industry goes to the workers.

We are joined by some of them tonight – the men and women of the UAW.

Today's high-tech vehicles are not your parents' trucks and vans. Building them takes a level of skill and craftsmanship that is quite simply extraordinary.

You build the strongest, toughest vehicles in the world – and you're making the Show-Me State the national leader in automotive excellence and innovation.

Your work ethic is second to none.

Your product is the best in the world.

You make Missouri proud.

Because of the work we did together ... these men and women have the dignity of a good, family-supporting job.

Those paychecks cover more than monthly bills. They help folks buy cars and houses. They pay for books and baseball gloves ... computers and college tuition. And put something in the collection plate on Sunday.

And it was made possible by the decisions made in this building.

This, my friends, is what public service is all about.

This is why we're here.

To create real opportunity ... that leaves no one behind.

The fact is: our state works best when everyone has an opportunity to succeed.

Every college student in our state deserves the opportunity to earn a degree that prepares them to compete in a global economy... and enter the workforce without a mountain of debt ...

Every parent in our state deserves the opportunity to get a job that pays enough to provide for their families ... and save a little, too.

Every farmer who wakes up before sunrise and works past sunset deserves a chance to sell his crops not just around the country ... but around the globe.

And every Missourian ... every Missourian ... deserves a government worthy of their trust.

That's what is expected of us.

We must demand it of ourselves ... and each other.

I believe that we're all here for the same reasons ... which brings us right back to the values instilled in me as a Scout: to do our duty ... to God and our country ... to help other people at all times ... and to leave things better than we found them.

Working together we will build a stronger Missouri for everyone ... and leave our great state a better place than we found it.

Our time is short.

Let's make the most of it.

Thank you ... and God Bless.

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Gov. Nixon to detail priorities during 2015 State of the State Address at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 21



Gov. Nixon delivers 2014 State of the State address



Satellite downlink information for tonight's 2014 State of the State address



Gov. Nixon to detail legislative, economic priorities during 2014 State of the State Address



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